

# Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) CN Labeling Program is a voluntary federal labeling program for Child Nutrition Programs. It provides food manufacturers the option to include a standardized food crediting statement on their product labels. The USDA approves labels prior to use and manufacturers must have quality control procedures and inspection oversight that meet USDA requirements. All manufacturers participating in the CN Labeling Program must have a quality control program approved by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) or National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

The USDA does not require that manufacturers make CN labeled products or that schools and institutions participating in Child Nutrition Programs purchase foods with CN labels. Purchasing decisions are at the discretion of the local school food authority (SFA). If the SFA requires a CN labeled product, this must be clearly stated in the SFA's purchasing specifications.

## CONTENTS OF CN LABELS

A CN label statement clearly identifies the contribution of a commercial product toward the meal pattern requirements, based on the USDA's evaluation of the product's formulation. Manufacturers state this contribution on their labels. CN labeling provides Child Nutrition Programs with a warranty that the product contributes to the meal pattern requirements as printed on the label.

CN labels are available only for **main dish entrees** that contribute to the meat/meat alternates component of the meal patterns. Examples include beef patties, cheese or meat pizzas, meat or cheese and bean burritos, egg rolls and breaded fish portions. The CN label will also indicate the contribution of other meal components that are part of these products. For example, CN labeled pizza may list contributions to the meat/meat alternates, grains and vegetables components. CN labeled breaded chicken nuggets may list contributions to the meat/meat alternates and grains components.

The CN label will be found on the actual product packaging and will always contain the following:

- the CN logo, which is a distinct border;
- the meal pattern contribution statement;
- a six-digit product identification number;
- the USDA authorization; and
- the month and year of approval.

This sample CN label for "Chicken Stir-Fry Bowl" indicates that the product provides 1 ½ ounce equivalents of meat, contributes toward three vegetable subgroups (dark green, red/orange and other) and provides 1 ½ ounce equivalents of whole grain-rich (WGR) grains.



**The USDA does not allow manufacturers to place the CN label on a fact sheet or any other product information.** To document a product's compliance with the meal pattern requirements, SFAs must have an original CN label from the product package. For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) handout, [\*Accepting Processed Product Documentation\*](#).

## Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program, continued

### PRODUCTS WITH NONCREDITABLE GRAINS

If a combination food contains grains that do not comply with the WGR criteria, the grain portion of the product is a noncreditable “extra” food. If the product meets the meal pattern requirements for the meat/meat alternates and vegetables components, it is still eligible for a CN label that credits toward these components. For example, breaded chicken patties or nuggets made with only enriched flour cannot credit toward the grains component but are eligible for a CN label that credits only toward the meat/meat alternates component. The CN label must include a disclaimer, stating *“This product contains grains that are not creditable in school meal programs. Additional grains must be served to meet meal pattern requirements.”* The disclaimer must be stated directly under the CN label crediting statement not in the CN box.

### RESOURCES

*Accepting Processed Product Documentation:*

[www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/acceptdoc.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/acceptdoc.pdf)

*Authorized Manufacturers and Labels:*

[www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/authorized-manufacturers-and-labels](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/authorized-manufacturers-and-labels)

*CN Labeling:*

[www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/cnlabeling/default.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/cnlabeling/default.htm)

*Criteria for Whole Grain-rich Foods:*

[www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/wgrcriteria.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/wgrcriteria.pdf)

*Crediting Foods (CSDE Web Page):*

[www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=333796](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=333796)

*Food Buying Guide for School Meal Programs:*

[www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-school-meal-programs](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-school-meal-programs)

*Guidance for Accepting Processed Product Documentation for Meal Pattern Requirements*

(CSDE Operational Memorandum 10-15):

[www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/opmemos/15/om\\_10-15.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/opmemos/15/om_10-15.pdf)

*Menu Planning Guide for School Meals:*

[www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=334320](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=334320)



For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) and [Meal Patterns](#) and [Crediting Foods](#) Web pages or contact the [school nutrition programs](#) staff in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457.

This handout is available at [www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/cnlabel.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/cnlabel.pdf).

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